

Medicare Rx Update: May 27, 2005

CMS Website for Pharmacies... goes live today at 2pm!

This week we are pleased to announce a new tool that will assist you in informing both pharmacists and beneficiaries about the new Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit. Created by pharmacists for pharmacists and pharmacies, you can now find a wealth of information at the new CMS Pharmacy website (<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarereform/pharmacy>).

The CMS Pharmacy website will provide information and guidance on topics important and specific to pharmacy, such as Part B versus Part D drug coverage issues, formulary and transition information, medication therapy management issues and much more. Special-practice pharmacies, including long-term care pharmacies, will find specific information on how Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage will impact their practices. Also, our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section provides answers to commonly asked questions about Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage.

Limited Income Subsidy (LIS) Campaigns taking shape... and communication has already begun!

As we reported last week, many pharmacies are planning a big push in late June and July to help LIS eligible beneficiaries sign up for assistance in pharmacies or at pharmacy sponsored events around the country.

On **May 20th**, CMS sent letters to those who automatically qualify for extra help with their prescription drugs provided through the new Medicare benefit (i.e., Medicare beneficiaries fully eligible for Medicare and Medicaid, as well as beneficiaries who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or are enrolled in Medicare Savings Plans (MSPs)). Beneficiaries who receive this letter do NOT have to apply for the subsidy. They will receive more information about how to enroll in a Medicare Prescription Drug plan in October.

On **May 27th**, the Social Security Administration will begin mailing LIS applications to beneficiaries who may qualify for the LIS. These mailing will go out on a rolling basis until August 16. These applications will determine if a beneficiary will receive extra help paying for prescriptions drugs if they choose to sign up for a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan. Remember, the SSA's Extra Help Online Application Tool will be available on or about July 1, 2005. This tool will make it easy for beneficiaries to apply for the LIS on-line.

CMS has issued guidance for States to assist them in processing SSA applications and making determinations for low-income subsidy eligibility. You may find the comprehensive list of Q&As starting on page 24 particularly helpful as you design your outreach plans for your LIS application drive.

http://new.cms.hhs.gov/States/03_lowincomesubsidy.asp

Consistency in messaging is a CMS priority as we educate consumers about the Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage. To help us keep messages for beneficiaries uniform and avoid confusion, we are providing you a link to our list of "preferred terms" to use when developing messages for beneficiaries. These terms have been tested and the list will be updated regularly.

<http://cmsnet.cms.hhs.gov/projects/mmacomm/terms/terminologyresource.pdf>

Coordination of benefits technology solution is on the way!

In case you missed it, this week CMS announced that it has awarded a contract to assist pharmacies and beneficiaries in coordinating benefits in the new Medicare program. Using existing pharmacy systems, pharmacies will be able to determine appropriate eligibility and

billing information for beneficiaries, even if they don't have their Plan card or can't remember their Plan name. While a primary purpose of the system is to facilitate calculation of beneficiaries true out of pocket costs (TrOOP), the system will provide relief to pharmacists who spend way too much time determining beneficiary coverage information (<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/media/press/release.asp?Counter=1466>).

Have a happy and safe Memorial Day weekend!